



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

A MAZAHUA CATECHISM IN TESTERA-AMERIND HIEROGLYPHICS

BY NICOLAS LEÓN

Translated by F. F. HILDER

M. Aubin, in his interesting *Mémoire sur la Peinture Didactique et l'Écriture Figurative des Anciens Mexicains*, applies the term "escritura testeriana" to the iconographic mnemonics formed by the Nahuas after the conquest for the purpose of learning and recalling to memory the Christian prayers taught to them by the missionaries. Such a designation appears to us to be improper, and this is demonstrated very clearly by the narratives of the old chroniclers Mendieta and Torquemada.

Father Jacobo de Testera, having become impatient at his inability to instruct the natives, in consequence of his ignorance of their language, availed himself of paintings on linen, which represented the substance of the Catholic doctrine; and spreading them before their eyes, he caused an intelligent native, who had been instructed by him, to explain them, interpreting what he had said.

It appears that this proceeding was suggested to the good priest by the natives themselves¹ who previously had used an analogous didactic method. It is therefore necessary to discriminate in this class of writing between what it contains of Amerindian and that which belongs to the Testerian. Torquemada in his *Monarchia Indiana* says:

These good fathers had a method of preaching not less ingenious than elaborate, and very beneficial to these Indians, because it is in conformity with the custom they have of treating a subject by pictures; and it was in this manner: They had painted on a linen cloth the Arti-

¹*Memoriales de Motolinia*, MS.

cles of Faith, on others the Ten Commandments, and on another the Seven Sacraments and such other matters as they desired relating to Christian doctrine. When the pastor wished to preach concerning the Commandments, he hung up, close to the spot where he placed himself to preach, the linen cloth containing the Commandments, at such a distance that with a wand he could point out any part of the cloth which he desired, and in this manner he proceeded to expound the mysteries which they contain, and the will of God which is written and comprised in them. He did the same when he wished to preach on the Articles of Faith : he hung up the cloth on which they were painted, and in this manner explained them clearly and distinctly, and in much the same manner all the Christian doctrine. In all the schools for boys there were used these linen cloths, of which I have obtained several ; although those who are now living have no necessity for these pictures, because they are better taught and accustomed to these mysteries, and on account of the abundance of languages which are now understood, of which in general those evangelists were ignorant.

The print contained in the *Rhetorica Christiana* by Valadés, page III, first edition, 1579, and also the title-pages of the two editions of Torquemada's *Monarchia Indiana* represent this method of teaching.

This mode of procedure, genuinely Testerian, obtained great acceptance among the missionaries of all the religious orders who were engaged in evangelizing in Mexico ; thus we see in Davila Padilla¹ that the Dominican Friar Father Gonzalo Lucero carried with him the doctrine of religion painted on some large linen cloths, and on arriving at a town he immediately caused the painting to be hung up so that all might see it. Having awakened a desire to understand it, which the ignorance of the Indians had made difficult, the good teacher took a wand in his hand and with it pointed out the pictures while he explained their meaning. On one cloth he had painted the glory of God enthroned in the highest Heaven, worshiped by angels and revered by saints, among whom were figured several natives ; and

¹*Hist. de la Fund. i Desc. de la Provincia de Santiago de Predicadores de Mexico*, 1625 ; lib. I, cap. LXXXI.

he explained that they were those who, having received the faith, had lived according to it until death; the angels assisting with various musical instruments and songs of praise signifying the joy of the blessed in the presence of God.

On a similar cloth there was painted the punishment of the damned in the gloomy fire of Hell which, without giving light, burns in that eternal prison where, in sight of horrible demons and various kinds of torment, the wicked atone for the sins which they have committed in this life. There were also depicted in this wretched place male and female Indians who, the preacher explained, were those who had not accepted the faith, and those who, having received it, had broken the commandments and died without repentance.

On another large cloth were painted great waters—signifying the changes and instability of the present life—on which moved two vessels, known to the Indians by the name of *canoas*, carrying very different people by different routes. In one vessel male and female Indians, with their rosaries in their hands and on their necks, journeyed toward heaven, some scourging themselves and others clasping their hands in prayer, and all accompanied by angels who carried oars in their hands to give to the Indians, that they might row toward the glory shown on the upper part of the cloth, the motives for which were painted complementally on the other part. There were also shown many demons who had seized the boat, holding it so that it could not proceed; some were being displaced by the angels and others by the Indians armed with the holy rosary. Some with ferocious countenances persevered in their stratagems, and others, turning away confounded and subdued, availed themselves of the other vessel, where they remained contented and quiet as if it were their own. There sailed in this boat male and female Indians represented as intoxicating themselves with great vessels of wine, others quarreling and killing each other, and still others in immodest attitudes. The angels were flying over this boat, but its miserable occupants

were so engrossed in their amusements that they cast behind them the inspirations which the angels, who extended to them rosaries, brought by divine command. Some of these wretches fixed their eyes and placed their hands on the vases of wine offered them by the demons, and others on the women who were with them. The Indians in this boat rowed with great satisfaction and stubborn strength, demonstrating their eagerness to arrive at the port of Hell, the painting of which was commenced at a lower corner of the cloth and continued to another.

In order to show how a mixed Testarian and Amerindian writing has been formed, we will quote a passage from Acosta¹:

Also they have written after their method, by images and characters, the same orations. And I have seen to my satisfaction in this place the prayers of the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Creed, and the Confession General in the said Indian method, and it is certain that anyone who sees it will admire it, because to denote the words "I a sinner, I make confession," they depict an Indian kneeling at the feet of a priest, as if he were making confession; and then for the words "the all-powerful God" they depict three faces with their crowns in the form of the Trinity; and for the glorious Virgin Mary they paint a portrait of Our Lady, half length, with a child; and for Saint Peter and Saint Paul, two heads with crowns and some keys and a sword; and in this manner the whole of the Confession is written by images, and when they fall short of images they insert characters, as *En que pequé*, etc.

More explicitly Torquemada writes²:

Many, on account of being of dull intellect, and others on account of old age, were unable to overcome difficulties with it in any manner, and sought other methods, each conforming to the best he discovered. Some depended on counting the words of the prayer, which they learned, with small stones or grains of corn, placing one for each word, or a stone or grain for each part of those which were pronounced separately, one after another; as, when they used this expression or word, "*Pater Noster*," one stone; for "*qui es en Cælis*," another; for "*Sanctificetur*," another; until the end of the prayer. Afterward pointing with the finger, they commenced with the first stone, saying "*Pater Noster*," then "*qui es en Cælis*," etc.

¹ *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*, lib. VI, cap. VII.

² *Op. cit.*, lib. XV.

Others sought another method (in my opinion very difficult, although curious); it was to study the words which in their language conform to and resemble the Latin in pronunciation, placing them on paper in their order, not by written words and formed with letters, but by pictures, and in this manner they were understood by characters. This will be easily comprehended; for example, the word in their language which most resembles the pronunciation of "*Pater*" is *pautli*, which means a small flag, with which they count the number twenty, which is represented by *pautli* and with which they express "*Pater*." For the second word, "*Noster*," the word they have which bears the greatest similarity to it in pronunciation is *nuchtli*, which is the name of the fruit which our people call "tuna" and in Spain "Indian fig"; therefore, to remind themselves of the word "*Noster*," they paint consecutively after the small flag a tuna, which they call *nochtli*, and in this manner they proceed; and some who are not confident of their memory use the same method in their confessions, carrying with them paintings in order to remind them of their sins. . . .

With these quotations I believe the characters and limits of (A) the true Testarian writing, (B) the Post-Spanish Amerindian, and (C) the Testera-Amerindian, are sufficiently described.

Until what epoch were classes B and C in use? It is natural and logical to surmise the extinction of both within a few lustums after their invention, as much by the diffusion of alphabetic writing as by the mutual knowledge of the native and European languages. Among the majority of the tribes of Mexico it so occurred; but in one—the Otomi—it did not, and it is certain that even today the Testera-Amerind writing is in use among them.

The Otomi family, with its derivatives, the Mazahua, Jonaz, and Pame, occupies an extensive portion of the territory of the republic of Mexico; for them the ages have passed in vain, because they have not lost the racial type, the peculiar language, nor their aboriginal customs. The dawn of the twentieth century finds them almost identical with their ancestors of the sixteenth century, it being possible to identify them easily by taking as a guide the texts of the chroniclers of that era.¹ This is not to be

¹ Sahagun, passim.

wondered at, inasmuch as their pre-Columbian conquerors themselves were unable to change their moral or physical characteristics.¹

In use among the members of one branch of that great family, the Mazahua, is the document which is here reproduced; but before entering upon an explanation respecting it, I will endeavor to determine the epoch in which it was probably written.

The document in question is a Christian discourse or catechism, traced over the original pages by Padre Geronimo de Ripalda, which shows that it was originally printed about 1616. Our mnemonic text is far from being equal to the primitive text of Ripalda, because it contains at the beginning the phrase "*Todo fiel*," which Ripalda did not write, nor is it found in his catechism until after the year 1771, the epoch in which the illustrious Archbishop Lorenzana printed for the first time the Catechism of the Third Mexican Council, written in the year 1583, and to which work the *Todo fiel* belongs.

If, therefore, until 1771 that text was known, printed, and in the hands of the multitude, it is reasonably deduced that our document dates from that epoch; and in corroboration of this assertion it may be added that the paper on which it is written is relatively modern.

How can we explain the use of this imperfect and difficult recordatory system? This is not difficult. The Indian stocks whose languages lend themselves readily to alphabetic writing quickly abandon hieroglyphics so imperfect and difficult; but this is not so with the Otomi, whose idiom is resistant to our Latin alphabet to that degree that their few printed texts provoked the censure of the Fourth Mexican Council and serious controversies between the professors of that language in that era. If to this be added what M. Aubin relates,² according to the information given him by the Curate Don Francisco Perez, it explains further the reason why, even in our own time, such catechisms are used. Aubin says:

¹ Ixtlilxochitl, *passim*.

² *Op. cit.*

Ces catéchismes en images étaient autrefois seuls tolérés dans la cure du P. Perez, de peur, disait-on, que les naturels ne se corrompissent par le contact des lettres européennes. On y fustigeait même l'Indien qui parlait espagnol.

The annexed illustrations are an exact and complete reproduction of the original manuscript, their bibliographic description being therefore unnecessary.

In it are contained, counting by leaves, the following :

1. The *Todo fiel Cristiano*.
2. *Pater, Ave, and Credo*.
3. Conclusion of the *Credo* and *Salve Regina*.
4. The Decalogue and Commandments of the Church.
5. Sacraments and Articles of Religion.
6. Conclusion of the Articles and commencement of the Works of Mercy.
7. Conclusion of the Works of Mercy and the Confession.
- 8, 9, 10, and 11. Declarations of the "*Nombres señal del Cristiano*," of the Creed, the Decalogue, and the Sacraments—all in questions and answers.

That which is inserted in alphabetic writing is in the Mazahua dialect.

For better explanation the following notes are given :

The adverb "now" is expressed by a hand with a bell which sounds or strikes the hour.

"All" is figured by a heap of human heads.

"All-powerful" by a similar heap of human heads overshadowed by a bird's wing.

"Blessed" is a female figure with a palm in her hands.

"I believe" is a kneeling woman with a rosary in her hand or with a cross, and sometimes with both.

"To suffer" is symbolized by Christ tied to a column.

"From between" is a wing and a half moon.

"And," conjunction, is a hand pointing or signaling, drawn in a horizontal position.

"Virgin" or "virginity" is a woman with a flower.

The ideas of "virginity and divine maternity" are represented by a flowering branch, the blossom of which is surrounded by crosses, a

larger cross, and a half-moon adorned in its convexity with small semi-circles and dots within and without.

"Catholic" is a female figure with both arms outstretched and a rosary in each hand.

"Everlasting" or "eternal" is represented by parallel lines.

The eighth commandment has a representation which is not wanting in the faculty of invention, and in it we believe is seen a pure Testerman figure; it is a human figure from whose mouth issues a tangled cord, with which it attempts to tie another human figure in front of it.

"A sin by word" is signified by the head of a mammal, perhaps a coyote, with the tongue hanging out.

"A sin by action" is represented by a heart surmounted by a human head with horns or perhaps a devil's head.

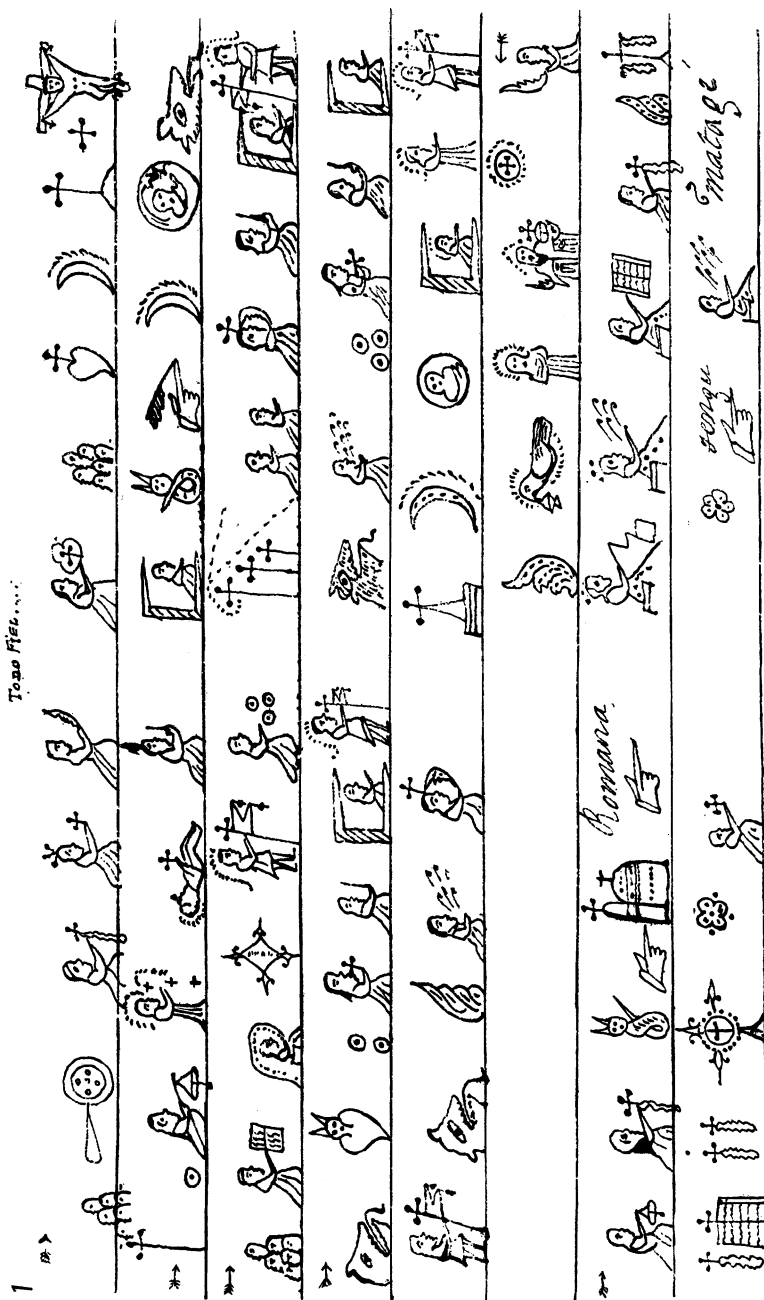
"Amen" is a bird's wing; "Jesus" a Greek cross. The wing and the cross united express "Amen Jesus."

The identification of the remaining figures is made easy by taking as a guide the *Catecismo de la Doctrina Cristiana* by Father Geronimo de Ripalda.

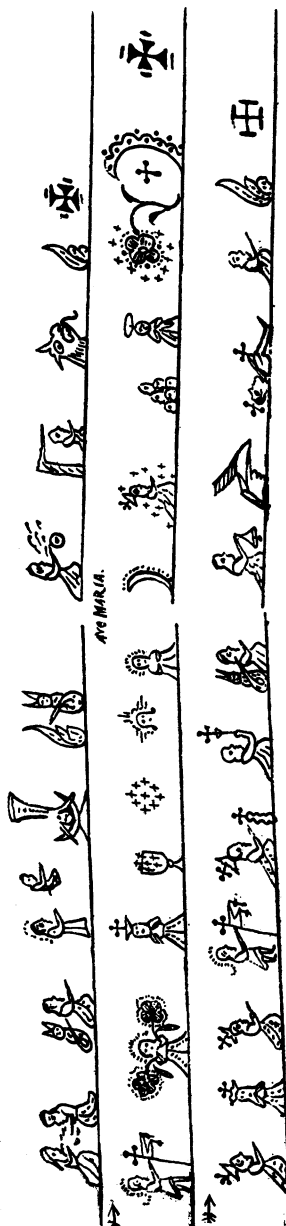
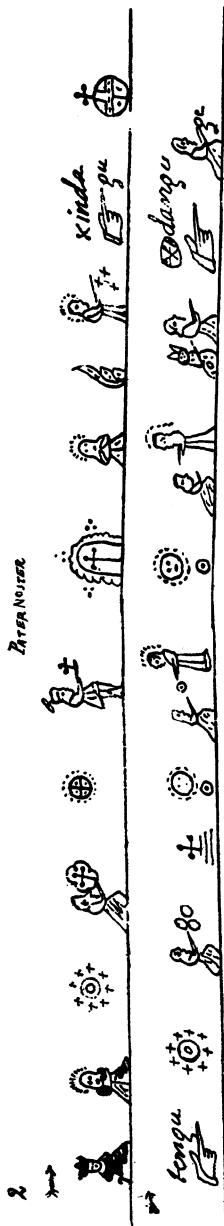
I am indebted to Sr Don Antonio Peñafiel, Director General of Statistics, for the following interesting data:

The States of Mexico in which are spoken the Otomi, Mazahua, and Pame dialects.

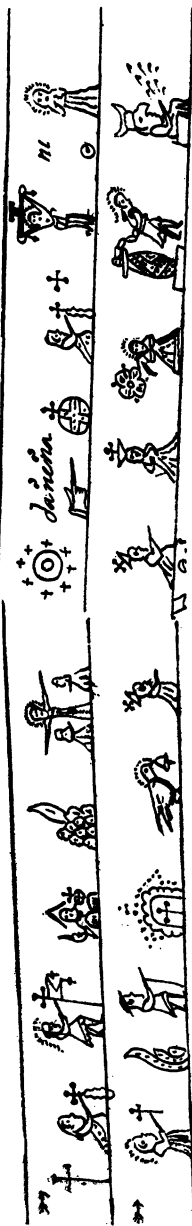
| States | OTOMI | | | MAZAHUA | | | PAME | | |
|------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|-------|---------|-------|
| | Males | Females | Total | Males | Females | Total | Males | Females | Total |
| Chihuahua..... | 1 | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Durango..... | 2 | 1 | 3 | | | | | | |
| Guanajuato.... | 7 | 9 | 16 | | | | | | |
| Hidalgo..... | 42,575 | 47,894 | 90,469 | 3 | | 3 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Jalisco..... | | 2 | 2 | | | | | | |
| Mexico..... | 27,653 | 29,614 | 57,267 | 158 | 91 | 249 | | | |
| Michoacan.... | 1,181 | 1,199 | 2,380 | 2,589 | 2,733 | 5,322 | | | |
| Nuevo Leon... | 1 | 2 | 3 | | | | | | |
| Oaxaca..... | | 2 | 3 | | | | | | |
| Puebla..... | 2,717 | 2,601 | 5,318 | | | | | | |
| S. Luis Potosí.. | 232 | 250 | 482 | | | | 1,378 | 1,345 | 2,723 |
| Sinaloa..... | | | | 2 | 1 | 3 | | | |
| Veracruz..... | 2,553 | 2,342 | 4,895 | | | | | | |
| Dist. Federal... | 173 | 189 | 362 | | | | | | |
| Totals..... | 77,096 | 84,105 | 161,201 | 2,752 | 2,825 | 5,577 | 1,381 | 1,348 | 2,729 |

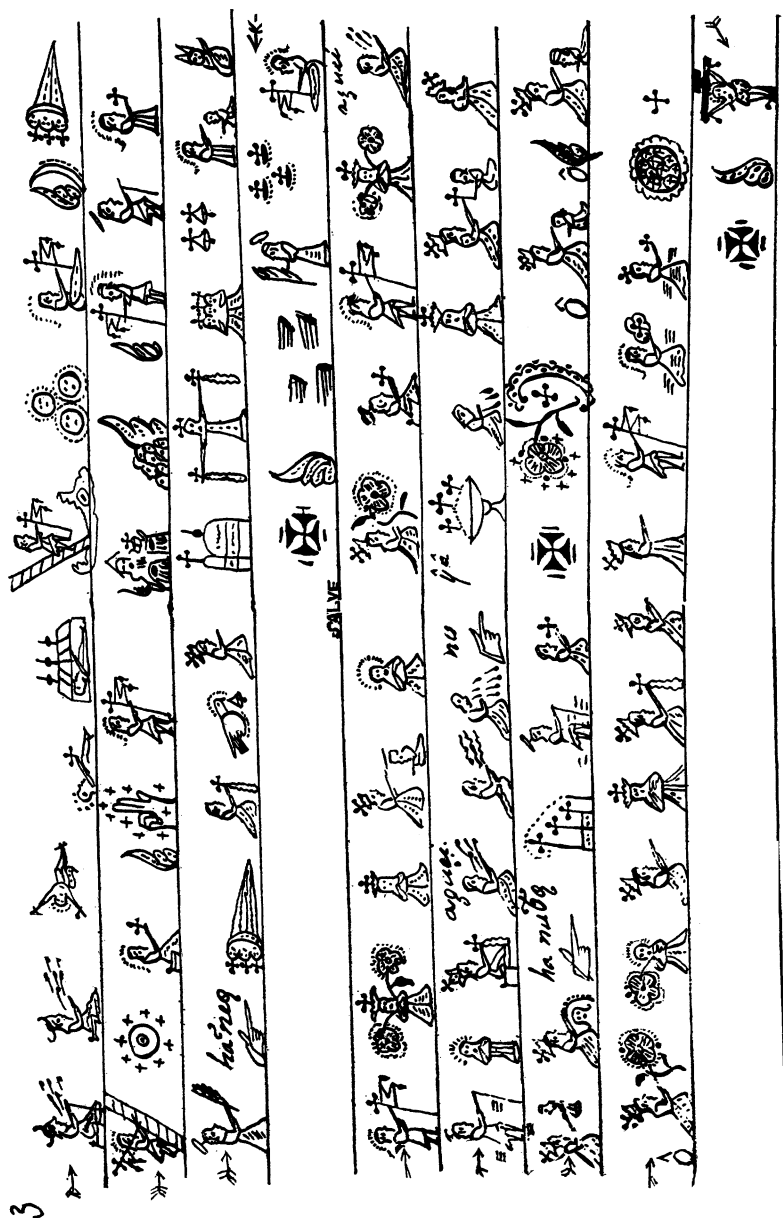


ZATEA NOTICE



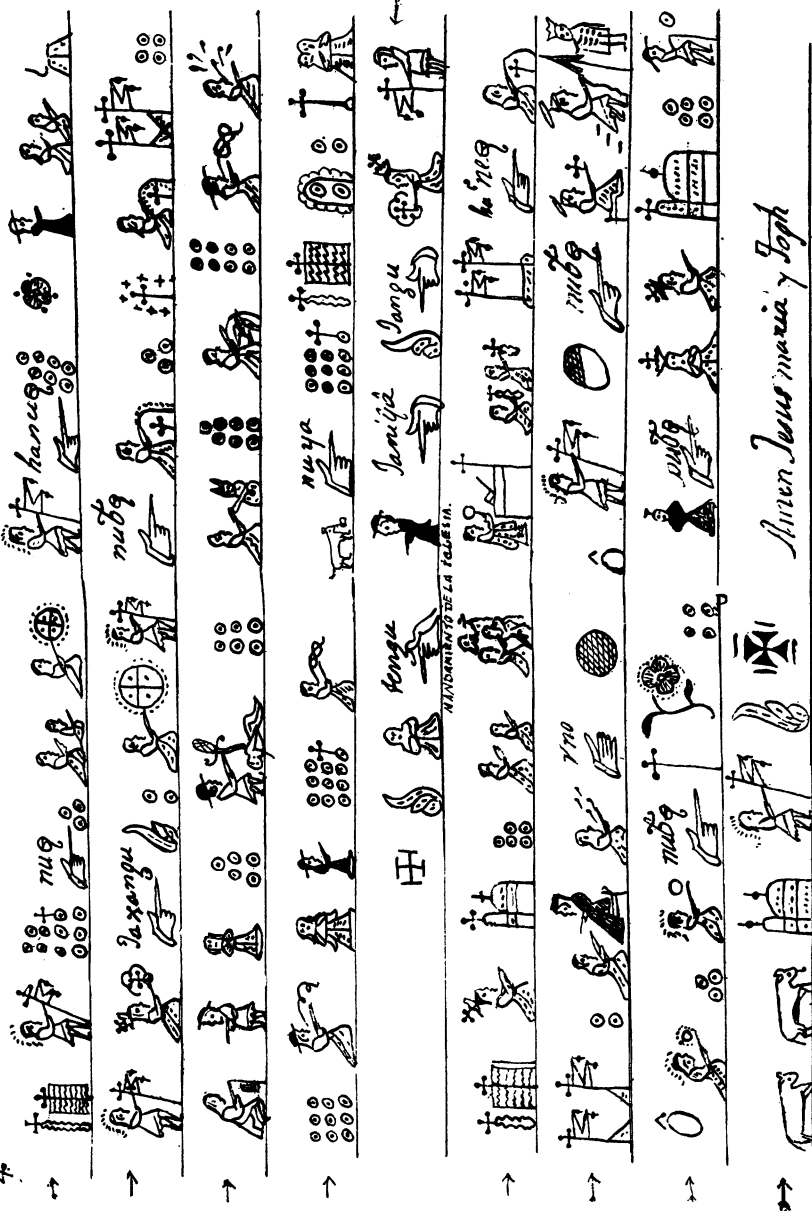
CREDO



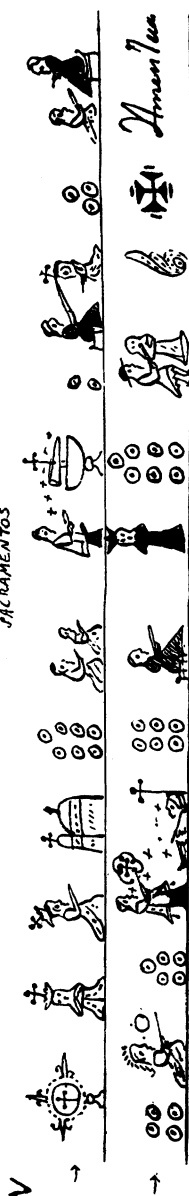


4.

Declinaca.



SACRAMENTOS



ARTÍCULOS DE FE.

